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ABSTRACT

Student discontent, faculty demands and the sometimes unwise behavior of boards of trustees have made the job of college president a difficult one. Because of the job's complexity, it is essential to redefine administrative functions, to base decision making on empirical findings, and to conduct institutional research and studies of governance to help determine what skills and abilities a president must possess. Though there are many different types of institutions with needs for different types of men, one basic requirement is essential - the president must enjoy the greatest mental health available to man. With all the pitfalls, there are still several good reasons why the job can be rewarding. (1) A college president can and must share in a new formulation of university decision making. There is great need for a kind of systems analysis of management for different types of institutions and for strong leadership in the area of decision making. (2) A president can help restore the learning purposes of the university and encourage a shift of emphasis from research to teaching. (3) The president can help guide the university in its important role in society. (AF)

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Group 9
Monday Morning, March 2

WHY BE A COLLEGE PRESIDENT TODAY?*

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One answer to the question "Why be a college president today?" was provided by Art Buchwald: because there is no room for you in the freshman class, and as president you'll have first dibs on any vacancy. The answer may be funny. The question isn't. One western college had six presidents in ten years. A mid-western university president told me he considered he was on 24-hour tenure. An ex-president of an eastern university bluntly said that anyone who would seriously consider taking his former job was, by definition, not qualified.

If ever a position was filled with Sturm und Drang, it's the presidency of a college or university today. On a single day in 1969 over 700 colleges around the world were erupting with varying degrees of student discontent. Over the past decade, students have taken uncompromising stands on a series of issues -- a reaction to an adult world which has too long been only too willing to compromise. Their involvement has left indelible marks on our campuses. Vigorous protests over civil rights, Vietnam, pollution mark the road of demand for university as well as social reform.

Faculty, too, have made their contribution to the turmoil of the campus. The decrease in federal funds for research has been a bitter pill for many attracted to the university primarily because of their interest in research. Faculty demands for greater participation in governance have led among other things to an acceleration of unionization. And, unlike the early days of student eruptions, when it was common for faculty members to retreat to their homes and pretend student life was of little or no concern to them, faculty today are often in open conflict over student issues. Faculty morale on many a campus has fallen to an all-time low. The faculty may no longer be capable of defining the purpose of the university.

Nor have boards of trustees, legally the pinnacle of our universities, always behaved in ways conducive to steadying the institution. Many have shown their zeal by firing the president, only to discover that they then had to hire another one. This last occupation at least took their minds off some other woes. In private institutions it has been feared that campus turmoil would depress financial gifts, without which the institution could not survive. In public institutions boards have sometimes become the vocal minority for the angry silent majority of citizens. While students maintain that in this age an education is a right, most board members vigorously contend it is a privilege. Neither side to this argument has understood the other.

Being a college president in the midst of all these factions is no easy task. But consider for a moment that neither is it easy now to be a mayor, or a state or federal legislator, let alone the president of the republic. In a sense, the

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HE001 415

campus turmoil is a reflection of at least a part of the turmoil throughout society. The consequences of economic inflation and the growing sense of moral if not legal injustice have been the seed bed of rising violence in our society. The fact that Spiro Agnew has suddenly risen from relative obscurity to third position on the list of most admired Americans bespeaks the otherwise hidden rage of a majority of adults against the present state of affairs. In our culture and on our campuses, we as a people are more confused and more at odds about the meaning of our organized existence than ever before in recent history.

In any condition of crisis there is always the danger that former values will be obliterated. But there is also in the very fluidity of a critical condition an opportunity to redefine and reorganize life. That is why there is a rising and rational demand for the reorganization of the campus. This has much bearing on everyone's work at the university, not the least of which is the work of the president. The presidency today is a profoundly different task from what it was yesterday. Just how different we cannot yet fully say.

Three major studies of college and university governance have been undertaken, and more will surely come. I have in mind the study sponsored by this Association under the direction of Morris Keeton, the work of the Carnegie Commission, and the new multi-pronged investigation by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In addition, a number of specialized studies have been made or are under way, three of which my own Foundation has been intimately associated with: the study of fund-raising by John Leslie, the study of major administrative posts by Mark Ingraham, and the study of the nature and function of the academic department in higher education by Paul Dressel. There are also self-studies conducted by institutions like Berkeley and Columbia which may serve as bases for assessment of all higher education governance. We are at long last fully aware that the unexamined life of the university administrator is not worth living.

Parallel to these hopefully fruitful efforts to redefine administrative functioning are examinations of student life and meaning. Soon after Berkeley in 1964 came analyses by Paul Heist, Joseph Katz, Kenneth Keniston, and many others. Since students are in the majority at our universities and the prime raison d'etre of these institutions, organization must be designed for them and their literate welfare. The most important revolution in the work of the president will probably occur when prospective prexies recognize this as a main area of attention.

We are also engaged in a mind-expanding development covered roughly by the term "institutional research." Begun over half a century ago at Stephens College, then a little two-year institution, institutional research has, in my mind, been cramped and narrow in both its pedagogical and administrative concerns. However, it is beginning to come into its own now, and I suggest that in the future institutional research will have a major hand in redefining the job of the president. Consider for a moment the development of what are called management information systems. In the past four years the Esso Education Foundation has made a series of grants for projects in this area, and the results of these projects, together with some of the best thinking in the field, were recently published under the title, Management Information Systems in Higher Education: The State of the Art. (Edited by Charles B. Johnson and William G. Katzenmeyer. Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina. 1969.) Vastly more complex is the recent federally financed regional and now national work on MIS by the Western Interstate Commission

on Higher Education. Our new ability to handle vast amounts of data will alter the job of every administrator including that of the president. Decision-making will be more fully grounded on empirical findings, and responsibilities for decision-making may be different in the future.

But MIS is limited to what is quantifiable at any given time. If institutional research is really to help, it must be designed as a think-tank, operations type of analysis. It must redefine the purposes of the university as well as keep systematic tabs on the means. Institutional research may help redefine the role of the president.

Institutional research and analyses of governance and students all help determine what skills and abilities a president must possess. Published studies of the university presidency appearing through the 1950s seem much out of date today -- proof that the office has changed. What kind of man should be sought for the office of president in the 1970s and beyond?

In the first place, let us keep in mind that there are and probably always will be vast differences among institutions and that many different types of men and women should therefore be sought for the post. In a romantic way we have always praised diversity among our institutions as if diversity were an end in itself. But lately we have begun to assess existentially what we mean by diversity. In certain ways, T. R. McConnell of Berkeley pointed the way and delved into the meanings of institutional differences. Robert Pace of the University of California at Los Angeles, with the early help of George Stern of Syracuse, developed ways of assessing the culture of the campus. Lately, Earl McGrath of Temple with the help of the Educational Testing Service -- and with financial help from the Kettering and Esso Education Foundations -- has plumbed some of the meanings of institutional functioning and vitality. This investigation of institutional differences will be carried forward. The next assignment is to try to measure institutional outcomes in some intelligent way -- what do universities really produce under differing conditions? Different kinds of institutions need different kinds of leadership. Sauce for the goose is not sauce for the gander.

While reflecting on what may always be the great variety of our institutions however, let me pause to comment on what I see as one basic requirement for the presidency of all colleges and universities. Let me be blunt: the president must enjoy the greatest mental health available to man. I have not yet heard of a selection committee requiring that nominees be subjected to a Rorschach test, but I would not entirely frown on the idea. Nor would I reject the idea that a person in public leadership may need psychiatric help at many points in his career. A leader must be integrated, aware, responsive in a creative sense to the problems and pressures of our society. This requires self-knowledge to a degree we may not have acknowledged. Life is not just cognitive, and working with organizations of people requires many non-cognitive perceptions and abilities. If there is ever to be a psychiatrist-in-residence, his first concern should be for the president. (I leave gurus to the dean of students office, although presidents should have ready access to poets, philosophers, and a host of other insightful people in our society.)

Given the pitfalls, promises, and requirements of today's campus situation, why be a college president? My answer is three-fold: to share in the new formulation of university decision-making, to aid in determining the new directions that learning should take, and to share in the new role the university will play in our society. There is a quiet revolution going on behind the noisy one in academe today. The president's job is to help guide this quiet but tremendously important revolution. The consequences of doing a good -- or bad -- job as president have never been greater. And for entirely different reasons than in the

past, when the president's job was hopefully defined as being educational primus inter pares, fund-raiser, and multi-public relations expert.

Consider first the matter of campus decision-making. I must agree with sociologist-administrator Logan Wilson, who declares: "I don't know of a single empirical study of a campus that delineates just how decisions are now made." (Saturday Review, January 10, 1970. p. 74.) However, decision-making is becoming more sophisticated than Wilson's statement might imply. Team management, which began in industry long ago and helped General Dwight Eisenhower tackle the European theatre in World War II, is spreading to the campus. What amounts to time-motion studies have on occasion been made of the presidency, and descriptive analyses have led to the development of chancellor-president and other divisions of labor.

What we most need is a kind of systems analysis of management for different types of institutions. An important question, for example: are faculty really competent to determine the curriculum? In 1825 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts determined that the faculty, not President Kirkland, should have authority over the curriculum at Harvard, and that decision was widely accepted. Nearly a century and a half later, I agree that power over the curriculum should still not lie with the president, but I question whether it should lie with the faculty either. More than one dean or provost, like the late Donald H. Morrison of Dartmouth, groaned that every curriculum is but a compromise among competing department demands. This, like many other decision-making areas of higher education, has not been seriously examined.

Faculty today may really have little or no interest in the curriculum. And what of the voice of the students with regard to the curriculum? Perhaps the pot had to call the kettle black, but here's the comment of a member of the University of California Board of Regents about one episode at Harvard: "If the university is an historical entity with a continuing role in society, the temporary student cannot be the determining factor on matters of fundamental policy. For this reason, it was ill-advised for the faculty of arts and letters at Harvard to agree to give a small section of the student body a veto on both the curriculum and staffing of its Afro-American program." (Op. cit., p. 68.)

Never has higher education had a greater need for strong leadership in the area of decision-making. Many critical decisions are arrived at through a process of default, many are arbitrary, many are made as the result of extraneous and irrelevant pressures. The situation on all of our campuses is likely to worsen unless the person at the top has intensive interest in, and unswervingly demands, intelligent decision-making.

The second reason I gave for the right man taking the right presidency has to do, as you remember, with the task of restoring the learning purposes of the university, something which cannot be accomplished without appropriate leadership. Economists like to speak of the educational activities of universities as labor-intensive, like the performing arts. Such statements merely symbolize the fact that our attention in the university has been in behalf of faculty, not students. We measure dollars put into faculty and assume we know what teaching is, whereas in truth we have little idea what teaching is and virtually no knowledge of the output of our whole higher educational enterprise. Traditionally, three activities were assumed to constitute and validate our universities, especially the public ones: teaching, research, and service. The last of the triology gained its halo in agriculture. The second produced the bomb and lots else. The first has been progressively ill-attended.

George J. Benston of the University of Rochester suggested recently that perhaps the future greatness of a university would be measured less by the research output of its faculty than by the quality of learning it provided its students. ("The Value of Good Teaching to the Ambitious University." Unpublished paper.) As a member of the faculty of business administration, it was in keeping for him to point out that it is today's students who will determine in the future how many private and public dollars will flow to a given institution ---and the decision will be based on the learning experience that each student had at that university. Perhaps the student revolt has only begun.

Fortunately, new things are happening on the learning front and these may rival the research outputs of university faculty. Before proceeding, let me make clear that I believe that "small" research belongs on campus; I am less certain about "big" research after our experience at Oak Ridge and later. The new focus on student learning is coming about because some faculty members are willing to apply learning theory from such variant fields as operant-respondent contitioning and creativity analysis. Some faculty really want to be what it was hoped they would be: architects of learning. Most refreshing of all is the comment of a recent student: "Education first and foremost should teach you to know yourself." (Saturday Review, January 10, 1970, p. 56.) Socrates did have a perennial freshness and vigor about him, didn't he?

Left to their own devices, faculty and students may do something about the restoration of the learning function in the university. But central leadership is really essential and anyone with high devotion to the learning function should consider the presidency of the university, and he should give this preference over a somewhat analogous role in the so-called "knowledge industry." Profitability is a high incentive for many, but the cutting edge is still -- and, to my mind, will always be -- the campus.

The third and final reason for being a university president today is the emerging new role of the university in our society. Helping to shape that role should challenge the best minds in the country. On the broad social front, consider the fact that soon over half of all secondary school graduates will be in some form of higher education. Or the fact that with the demand for open admissions policies, we must now truly investigate not just sub-cultural differences and abilities, but the character and relationship of non-cognitive and cognitive elements of human learning. Never was the moral task of higher education been greater, and we can never again retreat into the 18th century concepts of the university so piteously expounded by many of our faculties today. Testing and admissions need new skills and practices for tomorrow's world, and presidents have the opportunity to insist upon reform.

As important as the new internal constituency of the university is its emerging external relationships which cry for guidance. I refer her to the articulation among the three organized power centers of our society: industry, government, and higher education. Higher education and government, and industry and government, have progressed far in their ability to relate one to another in manpower, knowledge, and service. Less apparent is the growing connective tissue between industry and higher education. Many people know the importance of the manpower, knowledge, and service ties between industry and the university. Some of us want this articulation carefully guided in the best interests of our society. The vantage point of a presidency is necessary for intelligent articulation.

To help formulate campus decision-making, to help restore the learning function of the university, to help guide the university in its important role in society --

these are the opportunities to be seized by college and university presidents today. Besides intelligence, these activities demand leadership, empathy, and courage. Fortunately, there are many men and women who have these qualities and who enjoy the hectic life of a college president. Although some may not remain in office long, few would side with conservative William F. Buckley, Jr., who, when asked what he would do if elected mayor of New York City, replied: "Demand a recount!"